

TWO COMMONLY ABUSED OTC DRUGS

Dextromethorphan and meclizine – do these names ring a bell? Probably not, but they're likely both in your medicine cabinet right now. You might know them as cough medicine and motion sickness medicine. These two over-the-counter drugs are used to get high more often than all the other OTC's.

Dextromethorphan, or DXM, is a common ingredient in over-the-counter cough medicine. In fact, it's found in over 120 different kinds. It relieves coughing when taken as directed, but taking large amounts of DXM can cause hallucinations, dizziness, confusion, vomiting, liver damage and heart attacks. Even worse, if you take DXM with other drugs, you might suffer unknown, unpredictable effects.

DXM seems harmless – it's found in common OTC drugs like Robitussin, Vick's Formula 44 and Nyquil. On the street, however, DXM is often called:

- Triple C
- Skittles
- Tussin
- Vitamin D
- Dex

Meclizine, is found in OTC motion sickness medications that can ease a traveler's upset stomach. Taking too much of this common ingredient can cause hallucinations, as well as damage to vital organs such as the brain, liver, kidney and stomach.

Meclizine's hallucinogenic ingredient is usually just called by its brand name, Dramamine. Similarly, sometimes caffeine pills are called No-Doz or Vivarin, although they might actually be made by other brands.

OTC? NOT FOR ME!

Saying "No" to OTC Abuse

What can you do if one of your friends wants you to abuse OTCs? Try one of these ways to tell them "No".

- "No thanks. I don't like the taste of cough syrup."
- "Nah, I'm not in the mood to feel nauseous and jittery today."
- "I hear that stuff can make you really sick."



TEST YOURSELF!

Do you know everything there is to know about OTC drugs? Take this quiz and find out!

1. "OTC" stands for ____ medication.
a. Over-the-counter b. On-the counter
c. Over-the-cabinet d. Out-of-the-cabinet
2. Meclizine is a common ingredient in cough medicine
a. True b. False
3. DXM is called ____ on the streets.
a. Vitamin D b. Skittles
c. Dex d. All of the above
4. Abusing OTCs means not following the label.
a. True b. False
5. Caffeine is a drug.
a. True b. False

OVER THE COUNTER DRUGS



Answers: 1. a; 2. b; 3. d; 4. b; 5. a.

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DANGER IN THE MEDICINE CABINET

WHAT'S SOMETIMES SAFE but Sometimes Deadly?

Here's a hint: You probably have them in your medicine cabinet right now.

The answer? Over-the-counter drugs, or OTCs. They're medications that you don't need a prescription to buy, like headache pills, cough medicines, pain relievers and diet pills. You can find them at grocery stores, pharmacies and even some gas stations. They might seem harmless, but these drugs can cause some serious damage to your health if you don't read the labels.

CHEAP, LEGAL AND DANGEROUS How OTC Abuse Can Hurt You

You know that medicine is supposed to help you, but did you know that you can do serious damage to your body if you abuse OTC drugs? For example, check out the side effects of dextromethorphan, found in cough medicines:

- Brain damage
- Blackouts
- Insomnia
- Seizures
- Nausea
- Liver damage
- Death

Just because over-the-counter drugs are cheap, legal and easy to find doesn't mean that it's okay to abuse them. DXM abusers often take 8 to 10 times the recommended dosage of 15 to 30 milligrams! Taking such a large amount of DXM can cause the same side effects as many illegal drugs. Those side effects include:

- Delusions
- Very high heart rate
- Confusion
- Poor judgment



A SAFER HIGH?

The Real Threat of OTC Abuse

Cory was a freshman in high school in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. One Saturday evening, Cory left home to meet his friends at a local movie theater. Unfortunately, he never made it there.

Instead, Cory decided that taking DXM would make the movie more fun. Then he tried to cross a highway on the way to the movie theater. He was hit by two cars and died almost immediately.

The autopsy reported dangerous levels of dextromethorphan, found in an over-the-counter cold medicine, in Cory's body. His parents found an empty bottle of the drug left in the medicine cabinet.

Still think that abusing OTC drugs is no big deal? Taking too much DXM can cause disorientation, lack of coordination and the poor judgment that made Cory walk out onto a highway.

CAFFEINE PILLS:

Nervous and Nauseous

Caffeine is everywhere: sodas, coffee, tea, energy drinks and even chocolate. Even though it's all around us, caffeine is actually a drug. A drug that can send you to the hospital.

For example, here's what happens when you drink coffee. The caffeine stimulates your nervous system and makes you feel awake and alert. You decide to have another cup...and you end up feeling jittery and sick to your stomach.

Each cup of coffee contains about 100 milligrams of caffeine, and a single caffeine pill contains at least 200 milligrams.

So if extra coffee makes you a little jittery, imagine what a couple of concentrated doses of caffeine might do.

Taking caffeine pills is legal, but if you take too many you might experience the following symptoms:

- Nausea
- Delusions
- Chest pains
- Vomiting
- Panic attacks
- Heart palpitations

